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UNAVAILABLE FRENCH TEXTS.

In his able articles on 'Available French Texts,' Professor Bôcher has hitherto dealt chiefly with works destined for college use. I think it would be useful to supplement his remarks by a short notice of two or three books which have been recently published in this country, especially intended, as it seems, for High Schools, Academies, etc. These are not exactly text-books, but rather arrangements of French texts for the "study of literature." On the face of it, these works must be supposed to have been manufactured solely on business principles and not at all for the advancement of education or the study of language; for more wretched French is rarely, if ever, to be found, uncouth and ungrammatical as it is, and sprinkled here and there with glaring errors.

The first offender in this line is the author of number one of a series intended to do for Molière what Charles Lamb has done for Shakespere, viz., to reproduce in the shape of popular tales the principal plays of the great dramatist. But in a task in which none but a Lamb, perhaps, could succeed, our too presumptuous French *conteur* has not only totally failed, but has even done much towards rendering this first story of *L'Avare* almost repulsive to any reader of cultivated taste.

In the first place, grammatical blunders are not lacking, such as: *il vit de suite*, for *tout de suite* (p. 50);—*jusqu'à ce qu'il se trouva* (p. 8);—*glissa-t-elle tout bas* (p. 39), etc. In many instances the meaning of the words is misunderstood or misapplied: *un grand diabolotin* (viz., un petit diable) *de valet* (p. 14);—*flatte-ries crûment assaisonnées* (p. 28);—*une joie fauve* (p. 24), etc. There occur also, continually, the most ludicrous combinations of incongruous expressions: *il voyait se dresser devant lui les fantômes aimés* (p. 6);—*mon cœur est pris par une jeune personne pour laquelle* (this is an addition meant no doubt as an improvement on Molière) *je me suis senti transporté* (p. 15);—*elle est embarrassée dans ses affections*. Words are even coined (by what authority?): "*une incontrôlable commère*" (p. 14).

1 *Contes tirés de Molière*. New York: W. R. Jenkins.

One of the most offensive features is that, side by side with very ambitious writing, we find low and vulgar expressions which are strangely out of tune with the 'fine' language that precedes. One instance will be sufficient:—"riposta le larbin." This last word, by the way, is pure slang, not to be found in ordinary French dictionaries.

But these minor defects, bad as they are and by far too numerous, might almost be condoned, were it not for the insupportable trash which the author has thought fit to substitute for Molière's simple prose. Here is a specimen of the "élégant" (*sic*) and fine style in which the story is "modernized": "Au milieu de ses nuits sans sommeil, il voyait se dresser devant lui les fantômes aimés de son père, de sa mère, de sa sœur, du palais napolitain où de nombreux serviteurs s'empres- saient à le servir, et c'était une nostalgie puissante qui l'envahissait, lui montait à la gorge et lui soufflait comme un dégoût de la vie sur cette terre espagnole qu'il savait être aujourd'hui l'ennemie et la dominatrice de sa belle patrie italienne, et la meurtrière de sa famille" (p. 6). All this is but one sentence; and to such developments, eight or nine lines in length, is the reader commonly treated, whenever the author does not quote the text of the play itself. Alas, Molière, into what hands hast thou fallen!

Nearly as bad, although in a different way, is the first volume of another series purporting to present a 'Normal Course in French Literature.'² The idea, to a certain degree, is praiseworthy, since the author undertakes to give "wherever practicable, a whole masterpiece of a classical author, the parts not indispensable being summarized." Unfortunately the execution does not by any means correspond to the conception.

First of all, the compiler has thought proper to preface the extracts with 'notices' in his own style, which is such that we might almost doubt whether French is his mother-tongue; there is a strange, awkward, unnatural manner throughout, which shows at all events an unmistakable deterioration of the native language, possibly as the result of a long sojourn

2 *Normal series: Littérature française, première année*. New York: H. Holt & Co.

here. Short, jerky, halting and ill-balanced sentences are the rule, and, what is worse, the first condition of French writing, that of clearness and lucidity, is very often set at defiance. This happens especially through a strange misuse of the pronouns. It is surprising that, with short sentences, one should so often have to pause and read twice, in order to understand. Here are a few examples: *Ce talent ne s'affermirait qu'assez tard. IL avait plus de quarante ans* (p. 101);—*Lorsque l'éducation du Dauphin fut terminée, Louis XIV le nomma évêque de Meaux* (This is the opening sentence of a new paragraph, p. 183);—*SON nom de famille était J. B. Poquelin. SON père était valet de chambre. IL aurait bien voulu que son fils, etc.* (p. 76);—*Les Fables de la Fontaine sont un livre unique; il n'y a de plus populaire que le livre de la religion (?)* (p. 103);—*Là (le privilège de la chaire) le roi lui laissa pleine carrière. Les orateurs, que leur ministère y appelait purent l'exercer sans contrainte, et nul n'y apporta, etc.* (p. 181); Unnatural associations of words, expressions used in the wrong sense, are to be met with everywhere: "*l'entrée de la littérature moderne* (p. 26);—*vers sentencieux* (passim);—*sa langue n'est pas rouillée* (p. 97);—*un étonnement déconcerté*;—*le succès de cette pièce démentit Corneille* (p. 147); *immoler sa fille aux folles visions qui tiennent sa famille* (p. 85);—*le mettre de compte à demi dans leurs adversités* (p. 98), etc., etc.

We might have expected, as an offset to the dull uncouthness of the 'notices' and connecting summaries, that the compiler would have given all the explanatory notes that are absolutely necessary for the right understanding of the many difficult passages. But, incredible as it may seem, there are no notes to the text! And yet the proper way to proceed in such works is plainly shown by the examples, for instance, of Professor E. S. Joynes, in his excellent editions of classic plays, and, quite recently, of Professor T. F. Crane, who has forty pages of notes in the volume *Le Romantisme français*. Even in France the classic French authors for students in schools are always accompanied by very numerous foot-notes.

Our criticism may appear severe, but it is

not undeserved; in all matters pertaining to education, the old maxim should not be lost sight of: *Maxima . . . debetur reverentia*. It cannot but be injurious in many ways to have untrained writers attempting to palm off poor and faulty language on unsuspecting students.

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TEXT EMENDATION.

AN OBSCURE PASSAGE IN A LETTER OF JOHN OF AUSTRIA.

In the eighth letter of the correspondence of John of Austria, published by Morel-Fatio in "*L'Espagne au XVI^e et XVII^e siècle*," p. 122, there occurs the following passage: *Asadas que lo save bien el desventurado que lo ha probado á costa de lo que supo sentir el mismo etc.* In a note to *asadas*, Morel-Fatio says: "*Sic dans la copie. Je ne comprends pas cette phrase.*" As the editor tells us, in his introduction to these letters, that "le lecteur verra qu'il y a dans cette correspondance plusieurs passages difficiles á entendre et dont l'obscurité provient sans doute d'erreurs et d'omissions du copiste," we may not go very wrong in suspecting in *asadas* a slip of the copyist's pen for *aosadas* which, followed by *que*, as in this case, is not unfrequently found in older Spanish as the equivalent of *á fe que*, and renders the meaning of the passage perfectly clear. In this sense *aosadas que* occurs, for instance, four times in the "*Celestina*:" *y á aosadas que otra conocia peor el vino y eualquier mercaderia, acto III.—A aosadas que está todo á punto, VII.—A aosadas que me maten, si no te has asido á una palabrilla que te dije el otro dia, XII.—A aosadas que me dijo ella á mi lo cierto, XVII.*

H. R. L.

MELCHIOR GRIMM.

Melchior Grimm, par Edmond Scherer. Paris, Calmann Lévy, 1887, pp. 477.

Vieles ist über unsren Landsmann, den weltgewandten Diplomaten und Reporter